

[Portuguese Fisherman]

Yankee Folk

PORTUGUESE FISHERMAN

"I wouldn't never be happy without I had a boat under me."

Jeeze! I come near lose my boat. I just fix her up nice — new paint, clean her up, everything. Then I was going put in whole now engine.

Well, I need some tar, so I get her in a bucket, heat up upon fire, see? First thing I know, she catches — goes right up!

My boy he shout. I grab the 'stinguisher and let her have it, but tar she burns terrible. I see I'm going lose my boat. I holler at the boy and the men. They won't go down. You can't blame 'em. The flames she's coming up. But she's my boat. She's all I got, so what could I do?

I go down. I grab the tar bucket, throw her overboard, throw over some parts the engine, take blankets, stamp out the fire. Anyways, I save my boat. If she went, all my work gone — everything.

My hands she hurt preety bad, but I don't think she'll leave no scars. I been out fishing few days ago, but I wasn't no good. My hands she swole all up. Drive me crazy! Was a big catch and I couldn't do nothing. But I was glad get out in the boat again. I'll be out in 'nother week.

The boy's good fisherman. Portuguese boys, they do more like the old man. Some of 'em get these ideas to high school. Don't do them no good, 's I can see, but don't do them no harmneither. Lots these Americans they tell me their boys is in the city. Got jobs here, got

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jobs there. Me, I like have the boy on my boat. Teach him. Then I know where he is, what he's doing. The boat she'll be his. It's good for him know how to handle her.

I used to go out with my old man when I wasn't bigger than Jo. The old country, we was all fisherman, me and my brothers. My father fish, too. And 2 his father. Some dragging, but mostly with hooks. That's about all they do back there. Fish, and maybe marketing and like that. I could work most as good as a man time I was fourteen. I come over here when I was nineteen. The way I come, we had folks over here. They write to my father, tell him was good money over here. My old man come over and my mother and us four boys. Then we send for other people. That's how we all come.

On land the Portuguese and Americans don't always get on so good. But we fish together all right. It's different out in the boats.

There's the same rules for everyone. The rules for a captain and crew are the same everywhere, and we all want the same things — a good catch and a good market. We get on good on the sea.

They find out we're good fishermen. Anybody'll tell you they ain't no men can fish better than the Portuguese. We can always get jobs on the boats. I wouldn't want work on land all the time. Lots of the men do when they get older, but not me. I wouldn't never be happy without I had a boat under men me. I'm a good fisherman. Maybe I wouldn't do so good with a regular land job.

The Yankees they fish to get money enough to go ashore, run shops maybe, or do business. The Portuguese he don't like that. He fishes because he wants to. Because he don't want no boss. One time I try stay ashore couple years. I had a good job on a yacht. Good pay, the best of everything, but I didn't like it. Rather be independent. Not say this “yes sir” and “no sir” all the time. The Yankees they don't mind.

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They run stores, they work for bosses, and they don't care. But the Portuguese, he always a kind of a independent feller.

Of course the skippers are like bosses kinda, but it's not the same. And then you work you can be skipper yourself. I been captain now for a long time. My son, he'll be captain some day too.

3

I fish always on trawlers. It's hard work, but I don't never get tired. Makes a man hard, that kind of work. The trap boats, they get the bait. That ain't no work. Ain't fast enough for me. I like to fight. Fight wind and cold and weather. I don't feel the cold no more.

A while ago I come in from fishing. I come up on the dock and Jeeze! I was dirty. Stand all night clean fish and it was dirty weather the whole trip after first day. Well, up an the dock the wind whe she was blowing like sixty. I take off my shirt, fill a bucket of water, and I give myself a good wash. Feels good! But they's some city folks come down on the dock and they couldn't get over it, how I stood there wash myself with no shirt and the wind blowing. Say, the wind's my friend — and the water. I feel at home. In a house I'm like a big bull. Jeeze! if I can't feel a boat under me, I want to die.

The Portuguese is great for giving nicknames to every one. More'n the Americans, I guess. The man over at cold storage, that's Bennie Regular. That ain't his name. That's his nickname. They call him that 'cause he's a regular fellow. They call him that since he was little.

He's regular. They call me "Pulaski". "Pulaski." That means peppy, full of life, full of fun. Then they was a whole family in town. We used call them the "Baubas". "Baubas." Means dumb, kind of foolish. And they's Joe Portygee.

That means he's all Portuguese. Just like in the old country.

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Then they's my boy. They call him "Kak I." I dunno what that means. And young Morrie over there, he's "Fonda" on account of this Captain Fonda, told such big stories, and "Jorra Zorra," that means fox. Zorra's family got that name long time ago, like my family got "Captiva." Zorra's family was awful 4 good fishermen, so where they live they call 'em "Fox of the sea."

Then they's a whole family they call 'em "Goddam". "Goddam." Jackie Goddam, Mamie Goddam, and like that. That's cause the old lady she couldn't speak English so good and she'd call the children when they was little, "You come here, goddam." "Don't you do that, goddam." So they call 'em the "Goddams."

Then they's lots ain't so nice. The Portuguese they make losts lots of jokes and they'll name a man because he acts this way or that way, goes this place or / that, and sometimes the names they ain't so polite. They's one family, they used to call 'em the "Dirties." I guess the old woman she ain't such a good housekeeper or something. Anyways, that's what they call 'em.

You ask, "Do you know Frankie, or Manuel, or Tony?" and they'll say, "You mean one of the 'dirties'?"

They's names, too, for places. The Lisbons, we call 'em "Quail." That means rabbits. They's a real Portuguese family name, too, "Quail."

But Lisbons is always called "Quail." And the people that comes from St. Michael's Island, we call 'em "Kikes."

Lots old country people changes their names over here. Say old country names is too hard to say. I think that's foolish. Anybody can learn say "Silva" or [Captive?]" or "Cabral." Jeeze! They ain't so hard. Some the Perrys was Perrera, I guess. And here's these two brothers and they change the name, and now one's called Smith and the other Carter.

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That don't make no sense. Some the Roses was Rosario, But you wouldn't get me to change my name, Captiva. I guess not!

My great-grandfather he was Spanish, and he was took prisoner by the Moors. After two three months he escape. He comes to Portugal and settle down in little village near Lisbon. He was young fellow, very handsome, good 5 fisherman . He had scare from Moorsih Moorish prison. He was brave and also he told big stories, how he escape and kill Moors and everything. So everybody they call him "Captiva." That means "prisoner." So that's the name we had since then. People say the Captivas got to be brave because of my great-grandfather.

When I tell the children first, they won't believe me. But now they do. First they laugh and say, "Some more stories!" The old country she's far away. And they think they know more than their old man.

It's the schools does it. They used to keep sending word home — have so much milk, so much orange /# juice. Must brush teeth. I never brush my teeth in the old country. Nobody did. And I got fine teeth. I send word [?] to the teacher once. I says, "Tell 'em I know them kinds kids when they was little. Their fathers was fishermen just like me. They never had no orange juice and no quarts of milk." But they laugh. Say times is change. I guess so.

The schools is better over here. They wasn't no public schools where I come from. You pay fifty cents a month each child to a teacher and the one man he teach everything. The young peoply people over here, they have a good time. Back home the old folks was strict. Too strict. Young people was all the time running away. My kinds kids they, bring their friends home. That youngest girl of mine, she's always after me dance with her, go out places. Kids ain't afraid of the old folks no more. I think that's a good thing.

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Look at the Fishermen's Ball. It's for the families. My wife was there and my girls. My girl, the youngest one, she likes make me dance with her. She says, "Don't be behind the times, pa." She's a great kid.

It's nice when the whole family goes out that way. That's the way in Portugal. The families make what we call fiesta together. It's not lke like here, the women out all day, the men out all night. Unless once in a while like Saturday nights the men they go out have a few drinks. Plenty people say the Portuguese 6 don't care for their wives, 'cause they don't make such fuss. They care all right. Sure, they care. Only with us the man's the boss.

Everything is for the man. Makes him feel big, I guess. If a woman she's a good wife, has children, keeps the house nice, she's all right.

All the same, with us it's like with all the other countries. The woman she's boss in the house. She runs the house the way she wants, just so she has the meals right and takes care the children.

I think the Portuguese take more interest like in the children. Maybe it's only fishermen, they don't see them so often. The Americans they talk about the kids, but they don't stay around them so much. Sometimes Americans they'll say, "I shouldn't never have married. Just a worry." But the Portuguese he likes a good family.

III

This is a good season for fish. It's warm, that's why. When it comes cold and they's ice in the bay and like that, the fish they make for warmer waters. Have to chase them all over the place. But now they most jump into the boat.

It's dragging I do. We drag with big nets along the bottom. I don't go out nights much no more, but I got accomodations on my boat so's eight men can sleep on board. Eight

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men. She's a sloop. That's one mast. But they ain't no sailing now. My new engine she's beautiful.

Raises my profit. Used to cost ten, twelve dollars a day to take the boat out. Now costs only two, three. Much better engine.

I got a good crew, too. Me, I'm captain. Then I got engineer, and a cook. And my boy, he fishes. But we only stay out a day or two.

Used to go to Banks every year. It's just a habit some fishermen's got. They got to go to the Banks every year. That trip to the Banks, it was awful. Stay away six months, work night and day, and then after that you've made three, 7 four hundred dollars, 'tain't worth it. They's just as good fish near home, and not so hard work.

Of course, scalloping, that's different. That's terrible work, too. Out weeks and dragging with big heavy steel nets. But there's big money to it. Big money. But it's awful work. Have to be strong like a horse to stand it.

I don't never get scared. I don't know nothing else, only fishing and the sea. I never think about drowing drowning any more'n you think about danger in the streets. Sure, the women worries, I guess. They used to get down on the beach and yell and pray when *1 the boats was late out , [and?] [there was storms ,and *1] the womens always worrying about something, anyways.

My wife now, she worries sometimes about the boy. I tell her he's better off to sea than running around with all these wild crowds. Ain't drowned yet, nor I ain't drowned yet. She wouldn't really want me to come ashore. Her people was fishing folks too. She knows I wouldn't be no good on land.

My boat can hold twenty-five thousand pound. We don't often got that much. Sometimes we do, though. One time we went out seven thirty, eight o'clock at night. Nine o'clock we

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come back in — full. Twenty-five thousand pound this silver perch. Many Made a thousand dollar that one night. We fish on shares. I get most because the boat she's mine, all the man takes their share.

We go out nights when we hear the fish she's running good. That's a funny thing. We don't have no regular plan, where we go, but no boat never goes alone. We start out, try all the places where we know fish comes sometimes. Then when we come back, one boat comes up. The Cap says, "You has had good catch?" If I say, "Yes," then likely he'll say, "Jeeze, " I didn't get nothing. I'm coming with you to-morrow." Or if I didn't do so good, next day I go out with a crowd's got a good catch.

We start about three, four in the morning. It's dark , and boys! is it 8 cold! Well, [?] and when we got outside the harbor, not far — couple hours, maybe — and start fishing. It's get light then and they's coffee on the stove. Everybody feels good. I got a beautiful stove on my boat. We cook chowder, oyster stew, make coffee — everything. And plenty of room.

We don't get so tired unless by night we've worked hard. Then maybe we want stretch ourselves, have a / little fun. But we don't mind getting up early. People don't need so much sleep 's they think. Look at me. Been fishing thirty years. Sometimes up two, three nights. I always start early morning. But when I get home, I don't want to go to bed. Maybe have a little nap, then work around the house, or go out and see my firends friends . Have a little drink maybe down to Mac's, have some friends in for supper and a glass of ale. Once I'm off the boat, I want a change.

If I couldn't fry fish and make chowders I'd have starved plenty of times. The Yankees they generally puts salt pork in it. But we use the olive oil. Roll the fish up in flour. Then put your oil in the pan. Let it got real hot, smoking. And don't keep turning the fish[?],

Leave it cook one side till she's brown's a pork chop. We make galvanized pork, like this. Take a good pork roast or chops and all day you dip 'em in sauce made with vinegar and

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garlic and real hot peppers, then you cook 'em like always. Fried fish and galvanized pork — that's real Portuguese.

We made the Cape. We built it up. We're the Portuguese pilgrims. Us and the American fisherman. We make Gloucester too. I was up there a couple years. I fished all over, out of Chatham, out of Gloucester everywhere. When first come here there wasn't nothing, but sand and a few houses and docks and boats. We used dry the codfish out on the Dunes. They'd be pretty near miles of it spread out. The whole place stunk.

They was fishermen all up and down the Cape. The old whallers whalers went out then. Captain Avila down here, he found a chunk of ambergris once. And fishing 9 off the Grand Banks was a gold mine. You'd get so much you couldn't load it all. Times you'd be up two, three nights cleaning, up to your knees in it and half frozen.

Then the artists they come down. They must have painted a hundred miles of nets and boats and docks. And then the writers heard about it, and the summer people. But we started it. Even now they'll ask you to take them out in the boats and they ask questions. Fishing she seems exciting to them.

IV

It's a good life. You got be strong, and there used be big money in it. Not no more, though. Now the middleman he gets everything and they don't pay the prices anyhow. Sometimes you might as well throw away the catch. It don't keep forever. Give it away or throw it away if you can't sell it. I think it's like this, the government don't know the conditions of fishing. We make a beg big lot money some seasons, then for a long time we're broke. We got get good prices. Then they's credit. We used get credit eight months, a year maybe. Now it's tough to get three months. Money's scarce, they say, but I don't know. They's plenty for mortgage houses, for projects, for new playground. People don't appreciate the fisherman.

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You won't find many nowadays got much of anything saved. We most of us belong to one of these burial insurance societies. But the widows of most of us wouldn't have much if we went. That's why a man's foolish not to buy a house if he can, even if he has to have a pretty big [mortgage?] mortgage . And that's why it's good to own your boat. The Portuguese aren't as good for business as the Yankee fisherman.

Pretty soon we got to go down the Cape settle some business. The draggers and the seiners, they're in together like. Now the cold storage's got worried. They use the weirs — like traps — and they trawl. And they don't want us in shore get the silver perch. Last time we have a fight about this, they agree 10 we go three miles out summers. But winters we fish everywhere. That's why they don't like. There's no reason we should go outside winters.

The weirs ain't out winters. Summer's different.

But we won't have no trouble. We'll all go up to Boston. Whole bunch of us. They got to have silver parch. Perch's about the only fish they can make money on. It costs three cents a pound freeze the fish, and maybe it's cheap fish, gets only one, two cents a pound. Like that they don't make no money. But they's plenty plenty of fish. They claims we take all the fish. But that ain't so.

They just want it all. And it don't make sense we should go outside winters when they ain't fishing.

We don't mind going up to Boston. I guess not. Last time we hired us two buses. Sing all the way, stop have a little drink now and then.

Had a good time. And we win, so coming back we felt fine. Was a nice trip. I guess we'll have a / goon good one this time.